

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR NEWSLETTER

Dorothy Bendix, Chairman  
Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups  
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REPORT FROM CLEVELAND

The Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups sponsored two meetings at the A.L.A. Conference held in Cleveland, July 16-22, 1950.

As announced in an earlier issue of the NEWSLETTER the first meeting, held on Wednesday, July 19, at 10 a.m., presented an "informal discussion of cases and problems encountered in work with labor groups."

The discussion was based on the following questions sent to the Chairman by librarians active in work with labor groups:

- 1) Can libraries hope to be effective in their service to labor:
  - a. if they are unwilling to have their printing of labor lists done in union shops;
  - b. if their labor librarians are not union members?
- 2) Should library service to labor emphasize its service to the leadership of labor or to the rank and file membership?
- 3) Has any library had marked success with factory stations?  
If so, what types of books are in demand?
- 4) Should there be a trained librarian with a knowledge of the content of books to circulate the books that are on deposit in factories or in union headquarters?
- 5) Would it be feasible for the public library to sponsor an educational program in the factories during the lunch hour in those cases where the lunch period lasts an hour? (Such as film forum, a discussion group, recordings, book reviews, study groups, et cetera).

Present to offer labor's viewpoint was Mr. Sam Sponseller, Regional Director of the CIO, Cleveland, Ohio. When questioned as to what should be the goal of library service to labor, he suggested that it be to make labor better acquainted with the labor movement and its great social goals as well as with all movements for the improvement of society.

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It was the consensus of opinion that only librarians sympathetic to the labor movement should be in charge of library service to labor groups, and that any printed publicity material intended for labor groups should bear the union label.

Library representatives reported both success and failure in their efforts to reach labor groups. It was apparent that the feasibility of any program was dependent upon a variety of local factors. In comparing experiences with deposit collections in factories, the majority expressed the belief that their successful operation required the presence of a trained librarian. On the question of whether library service should be directed to labor leaders or to the rank and file, there was disagreement, both programs having sincere advocates.

Of the specific programs described, one of the most interesting was the "Labor Fair" held in the Worcester, Mass. Public Library in September 1949. Cornelia Churchill of that library outlined the planning of the fair. Another interesting program was reported by Madalyn M. Bradford of Huntington, West Virginia, who told of her library's successful cooperation with the union and with management in establishing deposit collections in local factories.

Others who spoke briefly of the methods employed in their own institutions were: Ida Goshkin, Akron Public Library; Ruth Shapiro, Milwaukee Public Library; Dorothy Bendix, Newark Public Library; Helen Behrens, Indianapolis Public Library; Helen Hirson, Boston Public Library; Bernice Bollenbacher, Cleveland Public Library.

The second meeting took place on Friday, July 21, at 10 a.m. It was a panel discussion on "Labor Looks at the Library." The panel members were: Alex Brackenridge, business agent, Carpenters Local No. 105, AFL; Joe Glazer, education director, United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum and Plastic Workers of America, CIO; Bill Kemsley, education director, Michigan CIO Council; James Stewart, international representative, International Chemical Workers Union, AFL. A summary of their speeches follows:

Glazer. Background of the labor movement. What Unions Are Trying To Do in Workers' Education.

The first thing librarians should do is try to find something out about the union movement. Although there are 16,000,000 members in the American trade unions many educated people do not know anything about it, don't understand what it is trying to do. Blame for this should be shared by both sides. Librarians should read the books on labor before trying to get workers to read them. The labor movement has a long history and struggle for existence. In its early days, joining together to correct wrongs was a conspiracy for which workers were arrested. Men have been killed and black-listed for efforts to organize, were forced to sign yellow-dog contracts, promising not to join a union as a condition of employment.

Librarians approaching labor officials should remember that these men have problems of their own. An important part of their work consists of settling grievances and dealing with immediate problems. If they neglect these, they lose their positions. The librarian should try again, if first efforts fail; she should get labor people to know and trust her,

and demonstrate a basic sympathy for what the labor movement is trying to do.

The field of workers' education is new in the labor movement. Although unions are 150 years old, workers' education in unions is about 25 years old, perhaps only a dozen years old in any effective form. This summer, 250 to 300 one-week summer schools are being held by unions. The history of the labor movement, collective bargaining, and other labor topics are subjects of study. In addition, the unionists study government, international relations, community organization - including libraries. Unions publish tons of pamphlets, some of what are very good, better than books on the subject. It is easy to get on mailing lists for this material. Other workers' education activities are classes and schools in local communities, week-end conferences, institutes, evening and morning classes for special shifts. There is a place for the library in all these activities.

#### Kemsley. Library Experience of the Michigan CIO

One activity of the CIO in Michigan has been a summer camp, on property owned by the CIO. Here one-week summer schools are held with courses on union problems, leadership training, publishing a local labor paper, etc. Through the Detroit Public Library and the Michigan State Library, a deposit of books is lent to the camp each summer. Also librarians spend a week each as camp librarian, seeing the program and meeting the people. Thus they can get to understand the problems of workers and union members and can explain library service to those attending. Those conducting the camp try to give time for reading and research but the chief value of the library is the encouragement it gives to students to make use of their local libraries when they return home.

A survey made last summer showed that 3/4 of the students used the camp library, 4/5 took available free material, and 1/4 intended to use their public libraries when they went home. Future plans for the camp include larger use of small books and pamphlets, a better supply of general reference tools, sending out a bibliography to be used in the public library by those who intend to come to camp. The instructors are urged to take their classes to the library in a group so they can see what materials there are. Officials plan to survey the use of public libraries by members of summer classes after their return to their own communities.

Experiences with libraries in local unions have been discouraging. Unions have not been able to keep them up even when a good start is made. Deposits from local public libraries in union offices have not been used, because other activities today are distracting many from reading. Workers might make more use of their public libraries if librarians were more friendly and if libraries were made more attractive and informal.

In time like these, both librarians and labor organizations should remember that at the same time Hitler was destroying the German trade unions wholesale book burning took place.

Brackenridge. The Information and Reference Needs of Unions.

The kind of information needed by unions depends on the community and on the kind of union. In general, labor is interested in search and critical information. Their job is building a better world and they might want to know, for instance, why carpenters' families go homeless when carpenters are out of work.

Many union users of the library do not know exactly what they want. For this reason it is helpful to have material, such as labor papers and magazines, laid out for easy browsing rather than in stacks. Such browsing can give a union official ideas of what has been tried in other unions. Personal contact with librarians is also helpful.

The trade union movement is interested in legislative issues. Service should be provided to let them know what is available in this field. If this type of information is made available and accessible, it will bring increased support to libraries.

Library service should be labor as well as business service. The desire to be impartial sometimes leads to the inclusion of anti-labor material under circumstances in which material that is hostile to management would not be included.

Stewart. Labor's Changing Role in the Community and the Need for Libraries to Recognize It.

Unions are interested in public education as well as the education of their own members. Because of economic pressures, the true story of labor's problems cannot be learned from the press. Schools are better but still do not tell the whole story. There is a chance for libraries to present the facts if they are courageous enough. Labor support and labor membership on library boards would be to the advantage of the libraries and might mean increased interest in the salaries and working conditions of librarians.

In the small library, management and industry are represented by their publications while labor seldom is. One possible project for the small library might be discussions between local management and labor under library auspices. This would add to the prestige of the library and could not be criticized. Libraries should prepare displays of labor material for the education of union members and the general public. Every effort should be made to stimulate interest.

Every human being feels the need for appreciation and being made to feel important. This is particularly true of the rank and file of labor whose general educational level is low. Libraries should trade on this feeling and make their buildings and surroundings as attractive as possible to the average person.

Comment from the Floor

Because of the special interest created by her remarks, we asked Miss Dorothea Hyle, librarian of the Cass County (Mo.) Library, to present her speech in writing for publication in this issue of the NEWSLETTER:

"Miss Bendix, ladies and gentlemen, I came to this meeting with one special purpose. I can't tell you what the Library has done for the Union, but I want to tell you what the Union has done for our Library. I am Dorothea Hyle, Cass County Library, in Missouri. You will have to think in terms of large rural areas now



and not in these large metropolitan places. Our Library covers 692 square miles, but we serve only 18,563 people.

"One day, I was more touched than I can remember. A group of our newly organized local no. 777, Carpenters Union of the AFL, called on me. They said they liked what the Library was doing and they wanted to help us. What could they do? We had obviously outgrown our space and we were moving part of our county book collection down into the basement of the hotel where we have our library headquarters branch. These union members built shelves for us to cover the wall space in the 75 ft. space, and built shelves upstairs for us and moved down the steel stacks, too. They also are now making shelving for our branch libraries. All of this, you understand, is for "free." They worked nights and Saturdays and on time off.

"By this time, some of the men in town, merchants and others, began to look askance at the project, and they, too, began offering their assistance. A prominent local lawyer and local Ford dealer gave me \$200 towards the project of remodelling the basement, and the merchants gave us paint and supplies at cost. The AFL Carpenters Council of nearby Kansas City, Missouri, sent us a check for \$100 and the local AFL gave us an additional \$25. We may have gotten the check from Kansas City because the men knew me there as I had worked with union groups while a librarian with the Kansas City Public Library.

"You gentlemen of the panel will understand me better than will the librarians here when I say that it is hard sledding for a new little union group to establish itself in a small town, especially in a rural area. The only way I could return these many favors to the union was, not in technical assistance which we are not prepared to give at this time (our Library is not yet three years old; I came to Cass County three years this September to organize the Library from scratch) but by giving our moral support.

"It may be that I haven't been there long enough yet to have my bluff called, but as County Librarian I am given a very nice vote of confidence, a certain prestige. People speak of the County Court, the County Prosecuting Attorney, and the County Librarian. We are accorded something that city librarians don't get.

"One day, one of the older members of the community called me out into the hall and asked me, 'Is it true that the union holds its meetings here in the Library?' To which I replied, 'Yes', and stood on both feet with the unspoken thought, 'Do you want to make something of it?' He didn't. The meetings are held in our little basement auditorium twice a month. I don't furnish beer as the gentleman on the panel suggested, but when the men are working, I do buy cokes for them, and not out of the petty cash but out of my own pocket, because, after all, I am most grateful to them as friends and neighbors. We have ash trays around and we try to make them as comfortable as possible for their meetings.

"The thing that pleases me most is that this is such a fine example of labor and management working together to help the local library. I don't disparage the gift of money. We have been most fortunate in receiving many fine gifts for our Library, but when men give freely of their time and skill, that is really a wonderful thing! I want to 'tell the world about it.'

"We are contemplating a change of quarters as we are fairly 'bursting at the seams.' We have an opportunity to get a building which is not new, and a lot of remodelling is called for. The union has assured me that when we are ready to make the change, they stand ready to help us with the necessary repairs.

"In rural areas, you know, one moves slowly, and that is what we are trying to do. American farmers are probably the last rugged individualists left in the United States today, and one doesn't thrust oneself upon them. One waits. That is what we have done. We are proud to say that our Library has many friends. When one group does an unusually generous thing for us, such as our AFL friends have done, we want them to know that they have our continuing moral support, for what it is worth. Thank you."

The regional director of the CIO in Cleveland, Mr. Sam Sponseller, mentioned the fact that libraries must look to sources other than endowments for funds in the future. Librarians should think in terms of wide public support and go to all groups for help. Labor wants representation and fair treatment. Librarians should remember that labor has received advice for many years. This situation creates resentment. Those going to labor should recognize the dignity of the labor group.

#### Questions

Why has labor not given support to libraries on a national level? Several answers were given - libraries have not asked for such support; it would be given if requested. The idea has not been sold to either side.

How can greater activity be secured from labor members on library boards after they are appointed? Some libraries have had unfortunate experiences in this respect, others have been more successful. The best cooperation probably comes from getting labor members who are really interested in the library, rather than from aiming at figures high in the labor world who are too busy to take an active part in library affairs.

What periodicals should a small library have to represent the labor point of view? Various suggestions were made, including the suggestion of consulting with local educational directors in selecting or listing labor material.

In addition to the meetings, the Joint Committee sponsored an exhibit booth at the Auditorium. Workers' education materials from a variety of organizations were available for distribution.

#### COOPERATION WITH ALES COMMITTEE ON BOOKS FOR LABOR SCHOOLS IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA.

At the suggestion of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups the AIA Council, at its meeting on July 21, 1950, passed the following Resolution unanimously:

WHEREAS, one of the major dangers in Western Germany and Austria is the resurgence of Nazism, and

WHEREAS, the trade unions in these countries are one of the strongest forces in fighting for democracy, and

WHEREAS, during the war the libraries of the labor schools of Western Germany and Austria were destroyed, and

WHEREAS, they are now being rebuilt, and there is a great need for books written both in English and in German, and

WHEREAS, these books are needed on the subject of the American labor movement as well as in the general field of the social sciences, and

WHEREAS, a Committee on Books for Labor Schools in Germany and Austria is being set up by the American Labor Education Service, (1776 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y.),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that librarians be encouraged to cooperate with this Committee and probe the possibilities of donating gifts of books to fulfill the often-expressed needs of the students and teachers of the labor schools of Austria and Western Germany.

After the ALES Committee decides what specific books are needed, and how the collection and shipment should be handled, we will report further in the NEWSLETTER and ask for cooperation from NEWSLETTER readers.

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SERVICE TO LABOR AT THE JEFFERSON SCHOOL LIBRARY

by Henry Black, Librarian  
New York City

The Jefferson School of Social Science is an independent, evening-school type, collegiate level, adult education institution established in 1944. Enrollment at the main building is normally between 3,000 and 4,500. The School's Library is open to the public and is heavily used by trade unionists, teachers, research workers, journalists and students from colleges and universities. Probably a third of our reference work is "non-school" in origin. Our clientele is very similar to that of a large public library.

Provision of information about labor differs in several respects from service in Akron, Boston, Newark and other places. We conceive of the labor movement in broader terms than simply the trade unions, and much of our work relates to working class political and cultural activities. The staff is objective, but not "impartial;" we believe that a healthy and expanding labor movement is the very foundation of democracy and that we should do everything possible to further it. Perhaps most important, we are concerned with helping the general public to understand and learn to support the labor movement as much as we are with direct service to people in the labor movement. The bookstock consists of about 25,000 books and pamphlets, three-fifths of them in the social sciences and about a quarter on labor history, trade unions, labor legislation, socialism and communism. 275 periodicals, including 60 trade union organs, are received. The staff normally consists of three people, two of them professional librarians.

Much attention is given to bibliographical work. Cataloging is full; analytics are made very freely, and all pamphlets are cataloged. Subject headings for our special field are more detailed than in the LC list; there are, for example, 18 subheads under TRADE UNIONS - U.S., e.g., POSITION ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ... PUBLIC RELATIONS, ... RELATIONS WITH COOPERATIVES, etc., and many organizations have several special subheads (as, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR - RELATIONS WITH NEGROES).

Both the Readers' Guide and the International Index are weak in their coverage of labor periodicals, and one of our most valuable tools is a periodical index that covers 25 labor and progressive journals not indexed elsewhere. It now

includes some 45,000 entries and is growing at the rate of 6,000 cards per year. Between 10,000 and 12,000 articles are located through it each year. Periodicals regularly covered include the CIO News, International Teamster, Machinists Monthly Journal, Political Affairs, New Times, etc. (A complete list is available for anyone interested). Indexing is the same type as in the Readers' Guide, with each article treated as a unit and as many subject headings given to it as seem appropriate. Author entries are made only for articles in selected magazines. There is also an index to book reviews in labor and progressive periodicals, a small picture collection, an embryonic index of portraits of prominent labor people and a clipping file that has material on about 900 organizations, persons and subjects. Between these various sources we can supply current English-language material about the labor movement -- trade unions, political parties, etc. -- in most of the countries of the world.

For a small staff the reference load is heavy, ranging from 40 to 150 inquiries per day; probably two-thirds of these relate to the labor movement. Two or three points about our reference work are worth noting. People expect us to give, not just any material, but reliable and trustworthy information. A frequent form of question is, "What good material do you have on the history of the NMU?" Not only knowledge of, but active interest in the labor movement is required, and many readers want our own recommendations concerning material on controversial matters. Speed is extremely important; for a busy trade union functionary or active rank-and-filer, who may also be a student at the school, material that cannot be laid out in five or ten minutes is often useless. Much reference work is concerned with immediate political problems, such as the fight against the Mundt-Nixon bill or the campaign for a national fair employment practice law. A considerable proportion of our reference work comes from people whose needs have not been met by public libraries in their cities.

In addition to routine reference work, some work is done with graduate students. While the Jefferson School does not yet offer much work at the graduate level, Ph.D. candidates come here from a number of universities in the northeast, usually to get information about the literature bearing on their problems, but not infrequently for advice about choice of thesis topic or direction of work. We are quite frank in giving such advice, not only because some people have found it useful and come back for more, but also because we believe that librarians in an institution like this, dealing as we do with the needs for printed material of large numbers of people, are competent and have the responsibility to help in guiding research. Naturally the number of such advanced students or research workers is not large, but it does run to several dozen per year.

An apparently unique feature of our service to the labor movement is informal consultation work for other libraries. During the past several years we have helped plan the reorganization of the research department of an international union, established a "morgue" for a publisher of several trade union papers, advised librarians about cataloging and acquisition policies and done some informal training of staff members of other organizations. This is on an individual, case-by-case basis; we tried at one time to work up some general monographs or pamphlets, but found that situations vary too widely and the personal relations involved are too important. One of our resources for aiding other libraries is the pamphlet "pool", a collection of duplicates, about 4,000 copies of 1,000 different pamphlets relating to the labor movement in the U. S. and abroad. Last year 1,400 items were shipped to other libraries from this "pool."

Measurement of library service is difficult and the measurement of specialized reference service particularly so. We estimate - based on occasional door-checks, sample counts of readers, occasional detailed listing of reference



questions and frequent sample counts of number of items used - that between 25,000 and 40,000 people use the Library each year. Annual budget for the Library is between \$10,000 and \$14,000.

In summary, the Jefferson School Library is one of the very few libraries in the United States open to the public whose main function is the provision of information about the labor movement. Ours is largely reference service, resting on a carefully selected bookstock, several special bibliographic aids and a staff that is both technically competent and actively concerned with extending and strengthening the labor movement. The rapid increase in the number of demands on us, a considerable proportion of them from people who have tried their public library in vain, indicate that there is a real need for this type of service elsewhere. Perhaps the most important thing shown by our work so far is the demand for, and the ability to use what is frequently considered "research" or "special" library service on the part of members of the "general public."

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#### NEWS OF GENERAL INTEREST

From Cleveland, Ohio:

Labor Day, 1950, was celebrated at the Cleveland Public Library with a special display, "Significant Books on Labor of the Past Fifty Years." The books on display were those chosen for their enduring value to students of labor by the editor of the anniversary edition of the Monthly Labor Review and his board of experts. In addition to the books, the library displayed pictures of the authors and of important labor events of the first fifty years of the century. In a pre-Labor Day broadcast over Station WJW on the Library's "Books That Live" program, we used the display and the list of ten labor books as a springboard for a discussion of books on labor.

During the past year the assistant in charge of labor materials in The Sociology Division has cooperated with the Adult Education Department in a series of activities designed to reach labor. One of these activities is the publication of our new Memo to Labor which will carry news about library activities and new books of interest to labor. It is being mailed to all union offices in the city and it is hoped that it will be especially useful to education chairmen.

The local CIO radio station WCUO very generously provided radio time for a library program in which we announced this special service and described many of the other services of the Library which we invited labor to use. This station has offered the Library additional time next year in which to talk about library books and services.

The Cleveland Public Library has increased its exhibit work in its attempt to reach labor. The Adult Education Department has taken special displays and book collections to many union conventions meeting in the city. The Main Library has had special street window displays welcoming trade union convention delegates to Cleveland and to the Library.

The demand for books on labor subjects is on the increase. This increase is probably the result of greater emphasis on labor subjects in our local colleges rather than on a greater demand from workers. However, our information services have been sought by labor leaders and officers to a greater extent than ever before. Progress has been slow, but we have had some encouraging experiences in our efforts to extend library service to labor.

Bernice Bollenbacher, Assistant, Sociology Division.

From Gary, Indiana:

Gary is the first library to purchase a copy of the film UNION AT WORK put out by the Textile Workers. To date, it has been shown to an audience of 180 CIO shop stewards and there has also been a preview with a representative of the Retail Clerks' Union (A.F.L.). Both are very enthusiastic about the film and think it general enough for use with many groups. We are going to distribute about 75 folders on the film and expect to preview it with program chairmen of the Chamber of Commerce, Lions, and other service clubs. We think they will be interested in seeing how a union works.

Harold W. Tucker, Librarian.

From New York City:

The New York Public Library Service to Trade Unions has been cooperating with the Leadership Training Institute of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Books and pamphlets were loaned to their library during the first four months. These consisted of titles selected either by the faculty of the Institute or by the Librarian in charge of the Service. They were incorporated into the collection which had been assembled by the Union for the use of the students. Although the students had heavy required textbook assignments, we understand, that there was considerable interest in the other materials supplied that were not part of required reading. Several students wanted to take some of the books with them. In order to encourage this interest they are being advised whom to contact in the libraries of the communities in which they are now at work.

In the course of the first session, the Librarian was asked to speak at one of the classes. She told them about the various divisions of The New York Public Library and invited them to come to her office for further advice and guidance. Quite a few of the students availed themselves of this opportunity and a number of others are known to have gone directly to the division for the materials which they needed for their written projects. The students will be out in the field for about three months. Upon their return a new collection of books and pamphlets will be sent in.

On July 28th, the Librarian in charge of Library Service to Trade Unions, The New York Public Library, was asked to speak at the Educational Conference of Staff Representatives of the Northeastern States Territory of the International Association of Machinists. This conference was the second phase of the training program instituted some two years ago by Mr. Tom Tippet, at which this Librarian had exhibited materials and for which many librarians throughout the country rendered some type of assistance.

The special topic under consideration at this time was that of "organizing." The discussion was therefore limited to the specific help that organizers could look for in The Public Library of their individual communities. A number of the statistical tools were explained briefly and other sources for obtaining financial data on local companies were indicated. The existence of "local" collections in many libraries was brought out. But the chief emphasis was on the fact that the inquiring union member should be clear about "what" he wants and leave it to the librarian to find the "how" of supplying it. There were some very good questions asked in the course of the talk and a lively discussion followed. The small collection of sample materials also elicited much interest. It is hoped that this interest will lead union members to make demands for further help both from their local libraries and from The New York Public Library.

Dorothy Kuhn Oko, in charge of  
Library Service to Trade Unions.